

# Connected Care Newsletter

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James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center



## A Critical Modality of Care: Use of VA Video Connect (VVC) during COVID-19

At VAMC Altoona, virtual care has allowed us to serve Veterans in many ways by bringing highly specialized care into our hospital and CBOCs, and even into Veterans' homes. COVID-19 has allowed Connected Care the opportunity to step up and create solutions during this unprecedented time while in-person care could place our vulnerable population at risk.

Prior to COVID-19, VVC had just begun to gain popularity nationwide. By using VVC, a patient may attend their appointments virtually from the comfort of their home using a smart device with a camera, such as a smart phone, tablet, or laptop - when medically appropriate. To adhere to social distancing guidelines, VA Medical Centers, including Altoona, are opting to use VVC to decrease foot traffic in hospitals and limit the amount of face-to-face appointments when possible.

"I started using VVC services after a few CVT sessions with my Behavioral Health provider in Pittsburgh. Utilizing the VVC services helped me to receive the care I needed wherever I wanted. VVC saved me a couple hours of travel time from my home to Pittsburgh and provided me with the same level of care. I'm happy to have had the opportunity to use VVC and will continue to do so, as long as those services are available," said Matthew Gibbons, a Veteran employee.

The My HealtheVet Coordinator, Heather McFadden, has also had success using VVC to meet virtually with patients to complete My HealtheVet account authentications, a process that is typically done in person.

To date, Altoona has successfully converted hundreds of patient appointments from face-to-face to virtual by use of VVC. The Connected Care Program and VVC implementation in Altoona has been vital in conserving protective equipment, while keeping our Veterans and employees safe during these times.

## NEW CVT AND VVC CLINICS HAVE BEEN ADDED!

### Clinic-Based Video

**Telehealth (CVT):** The patient is in Altoona or a CBOC and sees a provider using video telehealth.

### New Operational Clinics:

- CVT Cardiology COG Clinic (Pittsburgh)
- Pulmonary CVT Clinic (Pittsburgh)
- CVT Lactation Clinic (Erie)
- TelePrimary Care (Altoona to our CBOCs)
- Diabetes Self-Management Education Group (currently phone clinic due to COVID-19)

### CVT Clinics in Development:

- Low Vision Clinic

### VA Video Connect (VVC):

The patient is at home or another physical location and sees a provider in Altoona, a CBOC, or another VAMC using their personal smart device.

### New Operational Clinics:

- VVC Physical Therapy

### VVC Clinics in Development:

- VVC TeleCardiology with the Hollidaysburg State Veteran's Home
- VVC Social Work with the DuBois Vets Center

## Telehealth Clinic Spotlight: IMPACT Clinic

Altoona-based Veterans frequently travel to VA Pittsburgh in order to seek surgical services not provided in Altoona. This can be burdensome mentally, physically, and financially. Interdisciplinary Medical Preoperative Assessment Consultation and Treatment (IMPACT) Clinic is a virtual pre-operative assessment clinic that helps to prepare the patient for surgery in Pittsburgh and allows the patient and surgery staff to address concerns beforehand.

During the CVT appointment, an IMPACT provider in Pittsburgh connects virtually with a Telehealth Clinical Technician (TCT) and the patient in Altoona or one of the CBOC facilities. Once connected, the TCT takes and reports vitals. The provider performs a physical exam and reviews pertinent medical history. The TCT in Altoona assists with this assessment by use of telehealth equipment, such as a camera and stethoscope. These devices allow the provider to listen to the patient's heart, look down the patient's throat, and prepare the patient for upcoming surgery.

### **IMPACT Benefits:**

- Saving time and money related to Pittsburgh travel
- Avoiding delays in surgical planning
- Overall Veteran satisfaction

At the conclusion of the IMPACT appointment, patient-specific medication instructions are prepared and reviewed with the patient at the time of the CVT appointment. A printed copy is given to the patient to take home, along with relevant educational materials.

The Pittsburgh IMPACT clinic served 259 Altoona-based patients in fiscal year 2019 and approximately 132 patients thus far in fiscal year 2020. This clinic has been deemed a Best Practice by JCAHO and is a role model for quality of care.

## A Patient Perspective: Home Telehealth

The Home Telehealth (HT) Program allows patients the opportunity to manage high-risk diseases utilizing equipment in their homes and a RN Care Coordinator who provides support through daily monitoring and education. One of our new HT patients, Veteran Jovel Segear, described HT as convenient, easy to use, and extremely helpful in managing his blood pressure and glucose – especially as he travels often for work.

“Enrollment was very easy and seamless. I didn't feel like I had to do much at all,” said Jovel. The HT equipment he needed was shipped right to his house, and the RN Care Coordinator used a VVC call to introduce the new HT equipment to him and show him how it worked – all from the comfort and safety of his home.

“So far, the HT equipment has worked well,” said Jovel. He uses his equipment every day, and the HT equipment automatically sends his blood pressure and glucose readings to his RN Care Coordinator. Any time there is an issue or a concern with one of his readings, his Care Coordinator contacts him immediately. “The benefits are that I get responses much faster this way. I don't have to keep going back and forth to my Primary Care Provider for updates, stand in line, or be exposed to sick people or expose others to me if I am sick,” said Jovel.

When asked what other types of virtual care he has used, Jovel admitted that he has also used VVC to have appointments with his PACT Pharmacist, and really likes the technology. VVC, he said, is easy to use, self-explanatory, and can be done from anywhere.

Overall, Jovel admits that he is “impressed by what they can do over the phone and video conference.” He said that this type of technology is great for Veterans with disabilities, or difficulties traveling. The technology is very advanced, and I hope that they intend to keep the program because I intend to use it a lot.”

*Should you be interested in learning more about what Home Telehealth can do for you, contact Jennifer Toth, RN, at (814) 943-8164, ext. 8105.*

## How to Upgrade to a My HealtheVet Premium Account

My HealtheVet, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' online patient portal, makes managing your VA care simple and accessible. Veterans can get the most out of My HealtheVet with a free upgrade to a Premium My HealtheVet account. A Premium account includes all the features of Basic and Advanced accounts and offers you mobile access to your personal health information, the ability to send secure messages to your VA care team and other VA staff, and additional resources that empower you to take ownership of your health care and wellness.

### Upgrade in a Few Simple Steps

If you don't have a My HealtheVet account yet, please visit <https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/user-registration>.

There are three types of My HealtheVet accounts: Basic, Advanced, and Premium. To see what account type you have, check the icon that appears next to your name on the My HealtheVet website (P = Premium, A = Advanced, B = Basic).

To move from a Basic account to an Advanced account, make sure all the information in your My Profile page matches your VA records. Your account will automatically go to the Advanced level if that information matches.

Once you have an Advanced account, there are two ways to upgrade to a Premium account: online or in person.

### To upgrade your account online, follow these steps:

1. From the My HealtheVet login page, log in to your Advanced account using a sign-in partner (DS Logon Premium or ID.me).
2. Select Upgrade Now.
3. Check the box verifying that you are the owner of the My HealtheVet account and select Continue.
4. Check the box accepting the My HealtheVet Terms and Conditions and select Continue.

After selecting Continue, your My HealtheVet Advanced account will upgrade to a Premium account.

### To upgrade your account in person, follow these steps:

1. Log in to your My HealtheVet account and accept the Terms and Conditions
2. Bring your government-issued photo ID to the VA facility and present it to the My HealtheVet Coordinator or another authorized staff member
3. Complete the in-person identity verification process

Your My HealtheVet Advanced account will upgrade to Premium status.

For more information, visit [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov) or contact Heather McFadden, My HealtheVet Coordinator, at (814) 943-8164, ext. 7146.

